

# Book Review: Parole with Honor, by Wilbur La Roe, Jr.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

*Parole With Honor.* By Wilbur La Roe, Jr. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1939. Pp. 283.

The message of the volume under review deserves the careful and thoughtful consideration of the reader. It deals with a problem facing society each day of the year when prison gates open and release 214 felons—robbers, burglars, drug addicts and sex perverts. Its importance is easily seen when one realizes that each year some 60,000 criminals, most of them without benefit of parole, are discharged from prison and returned into our midst.

Perhaps few problems of modern society are so misunderstood as that of parole. It is with this problem that this book deals. To many, parole is a form of leniency which has its basis in sentimentality alone. To others, parole means that a parole-board has been "convinced" by bribery or other corrupt practices that a felon is ready to be let out of prison.

However, parole means something entirely different to the author of this book. He is a Washington, D. C., lawyer, who was chairman of the District of Columbia Parole Board. His background and experience in parole work provide authority for his views. These views are expressed in vivid language—not in abstractions but by actual case histories.

To the reviewer the message of Mr. La Roe appears to be expressed in these quoted sentences from the first part of his book—"Released prisoners become 'repeaters' because we make no intelligent plan for their return to the community. We simply open the prison gates and let them out. It is a perilous business, and a threat to the safety of every community."

In other words, Mr. LaRoe seems to contend that no prisoner should be released except on parole. It is this contention that is developed with clearness, sound argument and by means of case histories. The author points out that the prisoner who is released out-right usually finds society unwilling to receive him, no job can be obtained by him, his friends shun him. The inevitable result is that the discouraged ex-convict returns to his criminal haunts and becomes again an enemy of society. On the other hand the prisoner who is seeking parole, must have a job waiting before he can be released, then his conduct is safeguarded by friendly parole officers, and he has a reasonable chance of again becoming a good citizen.

The soundness of Mr. LaRoe's argument cannot be denied. He makes no claim that parole will be successful in every case. He recognizes—as all criminologists do—that certain individuals are so dangerous to society that they should not be released on parole. But he hastens to point out that it is equally dangerous to release them at all. He offers no solution for these trying cases. Likewise, space in his book is devoted to parole boards and parole systems that are so operated as to justify criticisms which many unthinking citizens direct to all systems of parole. Politics mixed with parole makes any parole work ineffective and worse than no parole.

To the reviewer it seems that a parole system is a necessary adjunct to the present method of sentencing prisoners. It is submitted that until the power of imposing sentences in criminal cases by judges who, in many cases, are unfitted for the task due to a lack of knowledge of the social sciences, social problems, psychiatry, and even temperamentally unsuited for this extremely important act, is removed and placed elsewhere, a good parole system is very necessary.

A valuable part of Mr. LaRoe's book lies in the fact that he describes the workings of a parole system with great detail. The reader can follow the steps a prisoner takes from the time of applying for parole until he is actually under the guardianship of his parole officer. Other parts of the book deal with the attitude of the public, police officers, and the sentencing judge. The whole book is written in a style which is simple and readable. The appendix contains a useful summary of the parole systems of the various states with comments as to the relative value of each one.

It appears to the reviewer that Mr. LaRoe has made a valuable contribution by his book to the subject of parole. It should be read by the general public and not just by those who are interested in the serious problems of crime and criminal law.

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Professor of Law.

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*The Censor Marches On*, By Morris L. Ernst and Alexander Lindey. Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., New York, N. Y. 1940 Pp. xi 346. \$2.50.

The authors of this book have represented the defense in many sex censorship cases. This may explain their militancy against the sex and obscenity censorship laws. In *The Censor Marches On*, they present their case against censorship of books, the radio, the theater and the movies. Their book is partial, and does not purport to be otherwise; each page evidences resentment at censorship as it is practiced in the United States.

The volume is not a text or a treatise. It discusses in narrative style the more important censorship cases in the American courts during the past twenty-five years, and is liberally interspersed with discursive treatment of trials, the personalities involved and the activities of public and private bodies on the censorship scene. The authors' major conclusion is that drastic revision should be made in the obscenity laws, so as to eliminate censorship as far as possible. For example, they recommend that motion picture censorship be abolished, because they feel that penal provisions in state legislation "afford ample protection against immoral exhibitions."

To this reviewer, it seems that the authors, like most people who become crusaders in a cause, urge extremes. Because they have found abuses in the field of censorship (the book points out many concededly ridiculous results arising from over-zealous censorship), the authors convey the impression that practically all obscenity censorship is bad. Messrs. Ernst and Lindey's views in this are undoubtedly opposed by many who do not have Victorian ideas on moral questions, but who nevertheless feel that censorship of movies, books and the radio is socially desirable and necessary.

One who is interested in a narrative treatment of the recent history of censorship, within and without the courts, will find this book an easy source of information. But he will know from a moment's reading that it is partial, and he may well question its conclusions.

PAUL NOELKE.